



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes February 17, 2021 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to join the meeting via Zoom and comment by telephone and email.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, and Councilmember (CMs) Jason Papanikolas and Ethan Sweep. CM Christopher Brittan-Powell had an excused absence. CM Papanikolas arrived at 7:06 pm. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Laura Allen and Town Clerk Kerstin Harper.

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey said that trash pickups for Thursday and Friday have been canceled due to an approaching winter storm. CM Brittan-Powell has an excused absence and CM Papanikolas is expected to join the meeting a little later.

Ethics Commission form: Mayor Dewey said the Town's Ethics Ordinance 110 requires appointment of an Ethics Commission to ensure the ethical conduct of elected officials and senior staff. The 3-member Commission is appointed by the Mayor for a term of 2 years. The Town will publish a form in the March Bulletin on which residents can apply for membership to the Ethics Commission. She hopes many residents will apply to fill this important position.

In response to MPT Kulpa-Eddy, Mayor Dewey said that the application is new but based on the similar Board of Elections application form. Interested residents would need to check all eligibility criteria to be considered for the position. Town employees are not eligible to serve, which is covered by criteria #3 that excludes Town officials from serving on the Ethics Commission.

2. Approval of the Agenda

On a motion by MPT Kulpa-Eddy and second by CM Sweep, the agenda was approved 3 to 0.

3. Budget Town Hall

TM Allen suggested moving this agenda item as no resident has yet joined the meeting. On a motion by MPT Kulpa-Eddy and second by CM Sweep, this item was moved to end of the agenda.

4. Discussion Items

Greenbelt Road working group update: CM Sweep said that Greenbelt and Berwyn Heights decided in January to set up a small working group with two Councilmembers from each municipality to develop a roadmap for the larger Greenbelt Road Task Force to move forward with Greenbelt Road improvements. The working group had its first meeting on February 4 and discussed the broader vision

and current status of Greenbelt Road improvements. They also set geographic parameters for redevelopment and identified future stakeholders the cities would have to work with, including SHA, M-NCPPC, Prince George's County and other entities. For the next meeting, working group members were asked to bring a list of problem areas or areas of interest they would like to see addressed. He plans to bring the Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights (WBBH) Task Force recommendations regarding Greenbelt Road.

Mayor Dewey thanked CMs Sweep and Brittan-Powell for participating in the Greenbelt Road workgroup and asked if Councilmembers had any questions or comments. There were none.

MML conference attendance: Mayor Dewey explained the Maryland Municipal League (MML) will hold a two-track in-person/ virtual summer conference, with each option covering the same workshops. Early bird registrations take place March 5 – 26. Councilmembers were requested to state their preferences. Clerk Harper was asked to make 2 reservations for the in-person conference and 3 for the virtual conference.

5. Department Reports

Mayor Dewey said nothing has changed drastically on the COVID vaccination front. Prince George's County has opened additional vaccination sites, including 3 mobile sites. Eligible residents are encouraged to sign up on multiple websites to increase their chances of early vaccination. The vaccination site at Six Flags is run by the State of Maryland and currently has no openings. Mayor Dewey continued that Prince George's County has started an online newsletter about vaccinations which contains a lot of valuable information and contains all of the different sign-up locations in one place. Berwyn Heights will make it available on its website and social media. Meanwhile, everyone is encouraged to continue to adhere to COVID safety protocols.

Mayor Dewey further reported that the Town has collected 7,000 pounds of food waste as part of its compost program which has been diverted from the landfill. Residents are also reminded to sign up for the electronic newsletter that comes out twice a month for more timely information on everything Berwyn Heights. In public safety news, all are reminded to drive safely in winter weather and shovel the sidewalks in front of their properties.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy gave updates on the Town organizations. The Education Advisory Committee (BHEAC) wrapped up a teacher appreciation event, which resulted in many Valentines being posted online for BHES teachers. PGCPS plans to reopen schools in April with a hybrid approach that lets families divide their schedule between in-person and virtual learning. A telephone Town Hall regarding the reopening is scheduled for February 18. College Park is hosting a virtual Town Hall with Board of Education member Joshua Thomas also on February 18. Mayor Dewey added that Berwyn Heights Elementary School PTA will hold a school specific meeting on the reopening on March 2, 6 pm.

The Green Team will next meet on March 9. The Committee is working on an adopt-a-block beautification program to help reduce litter on Town Streets. The Historical Committee next meets on February 24 and Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee on March 3. The Recreation Council is working on developing options for celebrating Berwyn Heights Day, which will be discussed at its next meeting. Residents are encouraged to participate to help with planning what will be the 125th anniversary of Berwyn Heights. The Boys & Girls Club is seeking feedback from families through their Facebook page on whether they would enroll their children in spring or summer sports if these were offered.

CM Papanikolas reminded residents to drive safely as snow is predicted for tomorrow and that COVID vaccinations have been cancelled.

CM Sweep reiterated that trash collection has been canceled due to snow.

3. Budget Town Hall (discussed out of order)

TM Allen explained the format of the Budget Town Hall is designed to solicit meaningful input from residents for setting priorities in the FY 2022 draft budget. To that end, the Town has published a budget survey in the Bulletin, online and on social media. It is best practice for a public organization to make important decisions collectively to ensure financial stability and sustainability. The engagement process used tonight is called 'One, Four, All' and consists of the moderator posing questions, participants taking a minute to think about an answer, making notes, and then engaging in discussion. Since only 4 Councilmembers were present and no residents, the discussion was amongst them.

Question 1: What do you love about Berwyn Heights?

CM Sweep replied that he enjoys 1) the Town's walkability and walkers talking with each other; 2) good access to recreational areas (Lake Artemesia, Greenbelt Park, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and Patuxent Wildlife Center); and 3) convenient amenities, such as shopping centers and restaurants.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said she loved 1) being close to her place of work, which probably applies to other residents who work in nearby offices, e.g. the University, BARC or NASA; and 2) the many social clubs and social activities normally taking place throughout the year.

CM Papanikolas said he too loves 1) the community atmosphere and neighborliness; 2) the variety of age groups, from families with children, to students and seniors; and 3) the proximity to everything and easy access to transportation.

Mayor Dewey said she most likes the Town's sense of community, which allowed her to quickly get to know many neighbors, residents and Town staff after moving here.

Question 2: 'How is Berwyn Heights Changing?'

CM Papanikolas said he hears there are more renters than there used to be, which may be reflecting a general trend in the County and a different job market that takes people away from home longer; 2) changing demographics with a larger share being minorities and professionals.

CM Sweep said he too has observed 1) a changing demographic, which he believes reflect national trends. This includes more renters and an aging population. It may require the Town to rethink services to enable more 'aging in place.' 2) a changing environment; and 3) changes in neighboring communities, such as the redevelopment of Route 1 and Route 193, including Beltway Plaza.

Mayor Dewey said there has been a change in the activities residents are interested in that is likely connected to how busy people are; 2) more diversity in everything from ethnicity to age groups to living arrangements; 3) more professionals due to increasing cost of housing; and 4) a changing environment, as evidenced in a declining tree canopy, more pollution, and increasing storm events.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said the Town is undergoing a generational transition with residents who bought their homes in the 1950s and 60s aging out; 2) a more diverse population moving in, some of whom speak different languages and require special outreach; 3) increase in electronic communications which may lead to a loss of personal interactions and connections.

In discussion, Mayor Dewey said she thinks changing demographics have not changed the level of interaction among residents, just the types of activities that connect residents. MPT Kulpa-Eddy believes there has been a decline in volunteering and hopes to rebuild that spirit. Mayor Dewey said volunteerism may come in waves. CM Papanikolas thought families have busier schedules making volunteering more difficult.

Question 3: What Actions would make Berwyn Heights an even better Place?

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said economic development on the Berwyn Heights side of Greenbelt Road would help increase commercial tax revenues and keep residential tax rates lower. Any additional amenities resulting from such development are also welcome.

CM Sweep said he would like to see more holistic food choices, a concern that has been brought up by others, supporting the walkability and bikeability of the Town; and adding art installations and educational exhibits.

Mayor Dewey said she would like to continue to focus on sustainability by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution and increasing the tree canopy. She also supports walkability and bikeability improvements and helping volunteers. Lastly, it is important for the Town to be transparent and share information and facilitate community connections, such as through featuring staff in various publications.

CM Papanikolas said he thinks it is important to have effective communication with residents rather than just be transparent. He also would have the Town take care of some small things like renewing faded road markings or working with property owners on making some properties more presentable.

In discussion, Councilmembers said effective communication includes using other languages to engage residents. Little, quick improvements, such as litter reduction, can make a big impact.

TM Allen summed up that she will use tonight's discussion as well as resident survey responses in preparing a draft budget. The draft budget will be presented in March, introduced in April and adopted in May. Residents are encouraged to provide feedback throughout the budget process. To encourage more resident participation, CM Papanikolas and Mayor Dewey suggested polling residents on how to make participation in Council meetings more convenient in terms of meeting times and format.

6. Resident and Community Comments

There were none.

There was a brief discussion of trash collection schedules in connection with snow forecasts.

On a motion by CM Papanikolas and second by CM Sweep, the meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk